1: Yao E-4 (no date) 1950 FT1 Yao FT1

# I. REGION OF MOZAMBIQUE

## YAO, MAKUA-LOMWE, MAKONDE

In the region between Lake Nyasa and the east coast of Africa, between the Lukuledi river in the north and the Zambesi in the south, there is a congeries of peoples whose culture is very similar over the whole area. They are the *Makonde* group, the *Yao* and the *Makua-Lomwe* peoples. Of these only the Yao has been studied in detail. The scanty information about the other inhabitants of the region will be summarized after the fuller summary of the Yao material, so that points of similarity and difference may appear more clearly. Fortunately for this procedure the Yao occupy a central position, from which they may be taken to represent in many ways the culture of the neighbouring peoples.

The *Makonde* inhabit the Makonde plateau between the Lukuledi and Rovuma rivers (39° and 40° longitude). Closely related to them are the *Mawia*, on the plateau of that name, south of the Rovuma; the *Mawia*, north of the Lukuledi river, on the Rondo plateau; and the *Matambwe*, in the Rovuma valley. It is possible that the *Ngindo*, *Ndendo*, and *Ndendeule* should also be included. This group seems to be culturally and linguistically distinct in several points from the Makua and Lomwe, and the Yao, although they have in common the main features of political and social organization.

The region of the *Yao* is between the Rovuma, Lujenda, and Luchilingo rivers. They also extend into Nyasaland and Tanganyika Territory.

The *Makua* occupy the area between the Lujenda and Lurio rivers and the coastal strip from the mouth of the Lurio nearly to Quilimane.

The *Lomwe* are sometimes regarded as a sub-branch of the Makua, but probably have as much right to be called a separate tribe as the Yao. They are bordered by the Makua on the north, east, and south, and by Marevi on the west. South of them, around Quilimane and east of the Milanje mountains, are the Chuabo,[1] related to the Makua and Lomwe, and also the Podzo, on the south bank of the Zambesi delta.

The region is forested lightly or heavily, and varies in character according to the elevation, soil, and humidity. The coastal belt from Mozambique northwards has thorn-bush vegetation, thick in parts, giving way to light forest and grassland further inland. In the uplands there is good forest, broad-leaved and evergreen, and deciduous trees near the lake district. Throughout the territory there are narrow strips of richer vegetation along the watercourses, and along the coast mangrove swamps occur at intervals. In the highlands the mornings and evenings are cool and pleasant for eight months of the year, and it is even cold at night in May and August, temperatures of 50° and 60° F. being common in the day. In the hot season the heat is severe, especially in the valley of the Rovuma. The mean annual rainfall for Mozambique is 39·50 in. and for Libonta on the lake, 39·9 in.[2]

The people are primarily cultivators, but the Yao keep cattle in the highlands. Both Yao and Makua traded with the Arabs and were energetic slave-raiders. The coast Makua and most of the Yao are Islamized.

[1] *c* pronounced as *ch*.

[2] *Handbook of Portuguese East Africa*, 1920, pp. 68–73.

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places it in the same group of languages as Makua, Lomwe, and Twimbuka, but not with Makonde. He counts Nghindo as a dialect of Yao.[1] Guthrie places it in the Makonde group, but not in the Makua-Lomwe group.[2]

The Yao language shows very little dialectical variation, which is attributed to the age-long Yao love of travel. Such differences as occur are found chiefly in accent or idiom, not in grammatical structure. There are five different divisions corresponding to the different branches of the tribe: (a) *Amakuli*, near the sources of the Rovuma; (b) *Mwambe*, near Matakas's, south of the Rovuma; (c) *Mwanenga*, near the south end of Lake Nyasa; (d) *Mangochi*, near Blantyre; (e) *Machinga*, on Mount Chikala and Zomba.[3]

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Yao boundary on the west, where they mix with Nyanja peoples of the east lake shore, is a line of hills about 1,500 ft. above the lake level, extending south to Mangochi. Sparing north-east from the fertile valley of the Mandimba, there is a fairly level plain, watered by other tributaries of the Lujenda, as far as Matakas's and Mwembe. On the east side of the Luchilingo river there is a fairly continuous line of mountain formations and hills, and from the source of the Mainje to its confluence with the Rovuma, there are lines of fortresses to the east and west, traversed by steep mountain tracks. From the Mainje source to the Rovuma the country is cut by deep streams and crossed by mountains 2,000 to 3,000 ft. high.[4] On the south bank of the Rovuma, below the confluence with the Lujenda, the country is a semi-desert, with barren stony soil, little water, and plentiful game. The Yao also inhabit the western edge of the Makonde plateau, where the valley of the Rovuma widens into a great plain. Here the sandstone of the Makonde plateau is denuded and the soil is barren and stony. The Makonde bush gives way to thin open forest of mimosa and other trees.[5] Most of the Yao country in the east of Portuguese East Africa is tsetse infested, but in the interior, approaching the east shore of Lake Nyasa, it is capable of supporting fine herds.[6]

South Nyasa district is mountainous in the east; the plain in the west stretches into Dedza and Ncheu districts. Owing to scarcity of water in the dry season this plain is thinly populated. The soil of the plain is sandy, except on the shores of the lake and the river bank, where it is rich alluvial soil; in the hilly parts the soil is clayish. During the last few years the lake level has risen and on the lake shore and the banks of the Shire river water is plentiful throughout the year. Smaller rivers have enough water all the year round to supply villages. The average annual rainfall at Fort Johnston is 33 in. for the last six rainy seasons, but the general average is 28 in. The average mean temperature is 75° F. The climate in the plains and at Fort Johnston is hot and trying in the hot season, but cooler on the hills. The greater part of upper Shire district is below 2,000 ft. in altitude and hot and unhealthy. In the dry weather most rivers are

[1] 1913, p. 69.
[2] 1948, p. 60. Generally some of the earlier informants support Duke's classification, since they are mainly the sources on which it was based (Sidnevnick, op. cit., Meredith Sanderson, 1912, p. xiii. Affinity with the language of the Gulf of Guinea has been claimed for Yao by Dr. Albert Drexel, of Innsbruck, quoted by Hoskyns, 1931, p. 3.
[3] Sidnevnick, J., 1910, pp. xiii-xvi; v., 1893, p. 69.
[4] Thompson, 1880, pp. 69-78.
[5] Johnston, J., 1893.
[6] Hamilton, 1913, p. 12.

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completely exhausted or reduced to a mere trickle. The average annual rainfall over the last ten years is 29·75 in. The shore waters of Lake Pamalombe are well stocked with fish. Both districts are well wooded, with a large variety of timber trees. In the dry sandy soil where the population is unable to live for lack of water, the prevalent type is mopane. A few of foothills from Zomba to Chikala are conserved as Forest Reserves.[1]

## MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY[2]

The Yao are chiefly agriculturists, and in the old days were also hunters. As they live largely in tsetse-infested areas, they do not keep cattle, except for a few herds near Fort Johnston and Zomba, in Nyasaland, and on the east of Lake Nyasa,[3] in the mountains of the Ruvuma valley around Mataka's.[4]

Abdallah describes a time when the Yao were economically self-sufficient, making their own bark-cloth, weaving, burning herbs for salt, and working iron for the tools they needed. Nevertheless, the tradition of coastward journeys for trading with the Arabs was well developed before the Europeans came to the country. They used to trade cattle and salt from the Masquoja and Lumwe for tobacco and hoes, and in exchange for slaves they got from the Arabs gunpowder, guns, swords, beads, coloured cloths, earthenware, and foodstuffs.[5] Slaving expeditions were among the most important activities of the chiefs.[6] The old tradition of the absence of the men from the village owing to these expeditions, is continued in modern times by soldiers and labour migrants to Southern Rhodesia and the Union. These men send back remittances to the area, but the main population is supported by agriculture. Cash is needed for purchasing salt and cloth, for paying certain dues and fines formerly paid in kind—adultery compensation, diviner's and initiation fees—as well as for tax and rent. Consequently, while certain crops, such as tobacco and ground-nuts, are grown for cash, any food crop is liable to be sold in one form or another in local markets or by the roadside.

The food crops are maize, sorghum, finger millet, sweet potatoes, ground-nuts, legumes. Fish is an important article of diet. Eggs are believed to cause sterility and are only eaten by those outside the child-procreating age; milk is disliked and never consumed.[7] *Termite alates* (flying ants) are a much relished food when they come out on nuptial flights. Rice is considered a superior food, and is eaten when possible on ritual occasions.[8]

Tobacco is the main cash crop, with individual production under the supervision of the Agricultural Department. The average cash earned per grower in 1943–4 was £5. 3s. This is overwhelmingly an external trade. Ground-nuts, which are sold at government-controlled markets to licensed buyers, bring in only a few shillings a year to the average seller. Women obtain cash by selling beer. At the lake shore the fishing industry is very important. Natives owning big nets are said to make between £10

[1] Murray, 1932, pp. 127–61.
[2] Unless otherwise stated, the information is from J. C. Mitchell, and relates to the Yao of south Nyasaland.
[3] Livingstone, 1874, pp. 72 and 80.
[4] See Livingstone, 1874, p. 68; Young, E., 1877, p. 130; Thompson, 1882, p. 78; Scheitz, 1893, p. 402; Maughan, c. 1905, pp. 86–7; Lane, 1934, pp. 33–7.
[5] Stannus, c. 1910, p. 34.
[6] Young, E., 1877, p. 122.
[7] Abdallah, 1919, pp. 10–11, 28–30.
[8] Barker, 1934, p. 14.

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example November to March inclusive. Diagram 1 shows the distribution of the rainfall during the year. Very little rain falls during other months. The initial rains of the year are ushered in by convectional storms and very heavy downpours. This causes a heavy run-off, flooding of the rivers and lake shores, and much erosion of the parched land which by this time has become

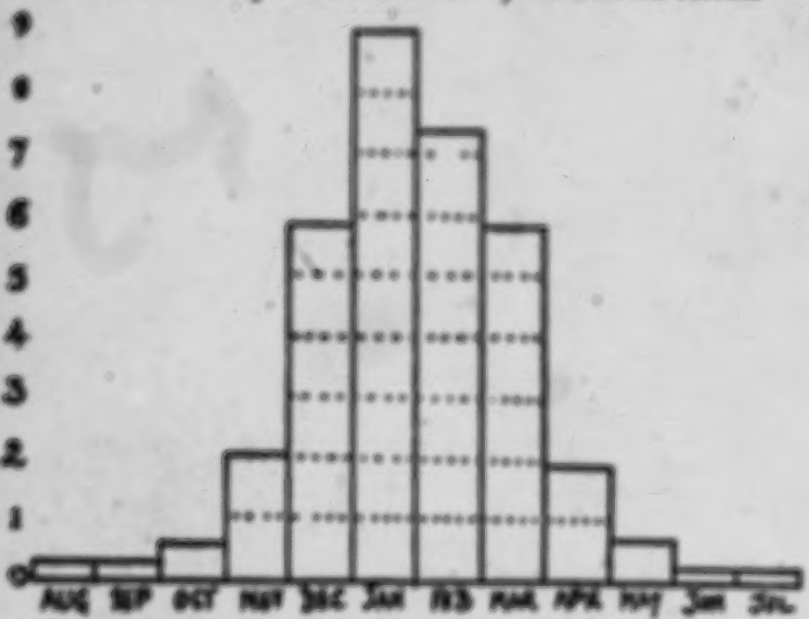


DIAGRAM 1. RAINFALL IN LOWLANDS AND FOUR HIGHLAND DISTRICTS.
This diagram shows that almost the whole of the rainfall occurs between November and April.

very dusty. During December there is usually little rain for a short period of a week or two. After that the rains change their character and become more steady and drenching. They decrease in March and April, and thereafter, little rain falls.

The Yao concept of the seasons follows this feature of the climate. The year is divided into two seasons, called *caku*, the wet season, and *cau*, the dry season. The wet season is the one in which most agricultural activity is carried out. The gardens are hoed up and planted, weeded and tended, and the crops harvested, between the months of October and May. During

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the dry season, in contrast to the busy wet season, there is much visiting and social activities are organized. Dances and initiation ceremonies also are mostly held during the dry season. The only agricultural work done during this time is the clearing of the bush and the stacking of the brushwood ready for burning.

The temperatures are high. I have no records for the three stations in the area because recording has started only recently. It is hottest during the months just preceding the rains, i.e. September to December, and coldest during May to August. I have never heard of frosts in the area so it is unlikely that the temperature falls below freezing point. Hornby records the mean maximum temperature for Liwonde as 87·5° F. and the mean minimum temperature as 59·5° F. These are for Liwonde station which is in the Shire Valley. The temperature for the plains and the highlands is probably a few degrees less.

## Vegetation

The natural vegetation in this area varies from thick rain forest along the permanent watercourses to open grassland in the marshy patches. In forestry reserves and other places where the vegetation has not been cut out, trees 20 to 30 feet high predominate with thin undergrowth. Along the Shire Valley much of the vegetation is untouched, but in the highlands and on the plain most of the unprotected forest has been cut out for garden lands. In the open spaces between trees the land is covered by elephant grass six to eight feet high.

## Population

The density of the population in Nyasaland as a whole is high in comparison with that in the surrounding territories.[1] Within the Territory itself the densities in some districts are as high as anywhere in Africa.[2] The population as a whole is concentrated in the highland districts of Dedza and the Shire Highlands. The districts in which I worked are less densely populated than most of the districts in the Southern Province, but of average density

[1] Expressing densities as total population per square mile. Nyasaland, 331 (1945); Tanganyika, 170 (1946); Portuguese East Africa, 143 (1938); Southern Rhodesia, 113 (1946); Northern Rhodesia, 30 (1946).

[2] Chiradzulu district, 509; Chulu, 1919; Zomba, 1324. *Nyasaland Census*, 1945, Table 8.